

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

REGIONAL AFFAIRS STRATEGIST:  
DELIBERATE DEVELOPMENT FOR SENIOR OFFICERS?

By

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

12 February 2009

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>FEB 2009</b>		2. REPORT TYPE <b>N/A</b>		3. DATES COVERED <b>-</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Regional Affairs Strategist: Deliberate Development for Senior Officers?</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>Air War College, Air university Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release, distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <b>The original document contains color images.</b>					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>SAR</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>34</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

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## **Biography**

Lieutenant Colonel Hunkins was commissioned at Officer Training School at Lackland AFB on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1989. After graduating from Undergraduate Pilot Training at Laughlin AFB, he remained there as a First Assignment Instructor Pilot in the T-38 Talon. In response to the cockpit shortages of the early 1990s, Lieutenant Colonel Hunkins enthusiastically volunteered to cross-train into rotary-wing aircraft and has served at Malmstrom AFB and as the US Exchange officer to the German Luftwaffe, flying the UH-1D aircraft for Search and Rescue missions in the Bavarian Alps. The Air Force designated him a Foreign Area Officer in 1998.

A graduate of the Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell AFB, Lieutenant Colonel Hunkins has served as the Executive Officer to the 2-Star Director of the Operations Division for NATO's northern air component, the Operations Officer and Squadron Commander of the 459<sup>th</sup> Airlift Squadron at Yokota AB, and Chief of Safety for the 374<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing in Tokyo, Japan.

Lieutenant Colonel Hunkins has a Bachelors Degree in Computer Science & Mathematics from the State University of New York at Binghamton, a Master's Degree in Administration from the University of Montana, and a Master's Degree in Military Science from the United States Air Force's Air University. His personal awards include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Meritorious Service Medal and the Air Force Commendation Medals.

## **Introduction**

*“We must deliberately develop a cadre of Air Force professionals with international insight, foreign language proficiency and cultural understanding—Airmen who have the right skill sets to understand the specific regional context in which air and space power may be applied.”*

--Gen John Jumper, May 2005

*“As a world power with international responsibilities, the United States has many requirements for officers trained in political-military affairs.”*

--Army Pamphlet P600-3-48

*“...we must build up our...capabilities that remain in chronic short supply; invest in foreign language training, cultural awareness...”*

--President Barack Obama’s agenda on rebuilding the “Military for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tasks”<sup>1</sup>

The Air Force’s fledgling International Affairs Specialist (IAS) Program is exactly what General Jumper envisioned—and what President Obama expects. Indeed, fashioned after the Army’s successful Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program, the IAS program has the best opportunity to date for creating a robust, meaningful cadre of competent internationally-minded airmen. But there’s much work to do. A widely varied cluster of skill sets spread across a broad spectrum of age groups creates a significant education and training dilemma for anyone trying to “standardize the IAS force.” More disturbing, the current scattershot array of abilities signals potential shortfalls for near-term senior officer IAS requirements. As a minimum, mandatory must-fill billets may require assigning inadequately trained and educated officers. During an information visit by staff officers from Secretary of the Air Force/International Affairs (SAF/IA) in August 2008, the Air War College (AWC) Commandant asked if “AWC was the right place to train these regionally focused senior officers.” This paper will answer the Commandant’s

question using the following construct, which incrementally analyzes the best method(s) for effective senior officer regional affairs education and training:

1. Definition of FAO, IAS, and Regional Affairs Strategist (RAS)
2. Current status of the USAF RAS program
3. Challenges to senior officer (O-5 and beyond) RAS development
4. Options for senior officer RAS development: language, regional experience, and education
5. Recommendations

Everything starts by determining and defining exactly what is needed to be considered a Regional Affairs Strategist within the USAF's International Affairs Specialist program.

### **DoD FAO Program and USAF IAS Program Definition**

General Jumper's quote concerning the importance of developing internationally focused airmen came on the heels of the 28 April, 2005 reissuance of DoD Directive 1315.17, "Military Department Foreign Area Officer Program:"

"The Combatant Commands shall have the requisite war fighting capabilities to achieve success on the non-linear battlefields of the future. These critical war fighting capabilities include foreign language proficiency and detailed knowledge of the regions of the world gained through in-depth study and personal experience<sup>2</sup>"

In 2004, General Jumper established a Tiger Team to study the issue of foreign-trained officers in the USAF. In April, 2005, he presented a detailed blueprint designed to fulfill the Secretary of Defense's requirement. The blueprint became Air Force Instruction (AFI) 16-109 "International Affairs Specialist Program" in June of 2006.

International Affairs Specialists were to "combine professional military skills with foreign language proficiency and an intimate, nuanced understanding of the history, language, culture, and political-military issues of the countries and regions in which the Air Force may operate.<sup>3</sup>" The mechanisms for achieving these skills are the Political-Military Affairs Strategist (PAS) and the Regional Affairs Strategist (RAS), collectively known as International Affairs



Specialists (IAS). The PAS track is designed for a “one-time” assignment after receiving in-residence developmental education whereas the RAS has a more broad and enduring set of skills most closely identified with the traditional Army FAO. RAS requirements are the focus of this paper.

After they’ve received the requisite education and training (discussed in depth later), RAS personnel will alternate between RAS-coded assignments and their core specialty. There are over 320 RAS positions in the USAF, 80% of which are overseas and 75% that are considered “joint” duty. Majors and Lt Cols can expect to hold assignments at U.S. embassies as Assistant Attache Officers and Security Assistance Officers. Additionally they may serve on any Air Force Major Commands’ Pol-Mil staff, as an Intel analyst, or as desk officers covering their specific area of expertise. As Colonels, the vast majority will become Defense Intelligence Agency assets primarily executing either Air or Defense Attache duties at U.S. embassies. Additionally, they can serve as Security Assistance Office chiefs, Office of the Secretary of Defense staff officers, Joint Force Air Component Commander advisors, or generically as Political advisors to MAJCOM and COCOM commanders.<sup>4</sup> Finally, there are currently three General Officer RAS positions: the Defense Attaches for Russia, China, and the United Kingdom. These positions are not Air Force specific and rotate between the services on an “as available” and “as required” basis.<sup>5</sup>

AFI 16-109 provides clear guidance on the required education and training for RAS’s and closely mirrors the verbiage from DoDD 1315.17. There are two specific requirements: (1) a regionally focused advanced academic degree, and (2) language proficiency.<sup>6</sup> Another suggestion espoused by the Tiger Team was in-country training and immersion—inexplicably, this was not included in the final regulation due to a Tiger Team-identified allowance for “on the

job training” opportunities for RAS personnel bound for their country of specialty to satisfy this requirement.<sup>7</sup> Interviews with SAF/IA personnel indicate that a new draft of AFI 16-109 will re-insert this as a requirement, thereby adding three concrete requirements: language, regional experience, and a regionally focused advanced academic degree.

These requirements directly mirror those of the US Army FAO program which breaks its program down into “stages of development.” First, officers attend an introductory FAO course at the US Army Special Warfare Center. Following this course, they will perform language training, usually at the Defense Language institute in Monterey, California. This training can last from 6 to 18 months depending on the complexity of the language. Next, Army FAOs will pursue an advanced academic degree that involves area studies. Finally, the Army mandates in-country immersion training, often for a time period of 1 to 1.5 years.<sup>8</sup>

The Air Force, for its part, has at least conceptually embraced this Army FAO construct as the model to emulate...and implementation of the program is underway. By committing to deliberate language training, a regionally focused advanced education degree, and in-country experience for its RAS personnel between the 7 and 12 year milestones, the Air Force RAS program is on track to become a sister organization to the Army FAO program. Unfortunately, however, there are extant requirements *today*—for all ranks—which must be filled! Until the “track” is continuous, there remains the problem of a shortage over the next 7-10 years of RAS-trained individuals capable of fulfilling must-fill field requirements.

So with a clear understanding of the RAS program and its requirements (*what* is needed--fluent, regionally educated airmen) that support the objectives (*why* it’s needed—to create internationally minded airmen), the problem remains how to proceed. The core issue centers on developing a sustainable lifecycle of personnel who accomplish in-depth education and training

in subjects that are, in many ways, largely non-transferable (a South American Spanish speaker will have a skill set that doesn't readily translate to the Far East Mandarin Chinese speaker). To properly analyze viable solutions, we must first understand both (1) from where the program came from and (2) where it stands today.

### **Current Status: How the “old” FAO track became the “new” IAS program**

Muddying the waters of IAS program implementation are the remnants of the well-intentioned but ill-fated 20<sup>th</sup> Century USAF FAO program. Conceived in the late 1990s in response to a CORONA initiative, the FAO program depended on individuals “self-identifying” skill-sets in order to fulfill emerging requirements. Unfortunately, no real statutory oversight or verification measures existed—or were required—to ensure integrity or control over the system, mostly because of the “volunteer” nature of the original program.

Under the old FAO program, a foreign language speaking or other “regionally specific” officer would initiate contact with the Air Force Foreign Area Officers office for guidance and procedures on how to apply to be a FAO. This FAO office had a clear charter, based on identification of officers with a pre-existing skill set:

“The AF FAO program stood up in 1997 to track officers with foreign language and regional skills, and to provide training opportunities that maintain and improve those skills. FAO is a career-broadening specialty; positions requiring this specialized skill set are identified with the 16FXX Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) and are filled by officers from all career specialties. *The FAO program targets officers with a basic level of existing language/regional skills and further develops those skills to meet AF needs.*”<sup>9</sup> [Italics added for emphasis]

The process for acceptance into the program was simple. An officer would contact the office, have his or her name added to the list, and wait for return contact. At some point the FAO office would analyze the applicant's self-identified skills and reach a decision regarding each person on the application list. If accepted, the applicant would receive a 16F Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) on his or her records, making him or her “available” for potential

taskings. The program was designed to “pull” in people (volunteers) who had fortuitously developed one or more skills. Shortly after General Jumper announced implementation of the IAS program, the Air Force 16F AFSC for FAO’s disappeared. Clearly, the USAF decided to take the implementation of the new IAS program—designed to specifically develop regional experts—seriously.

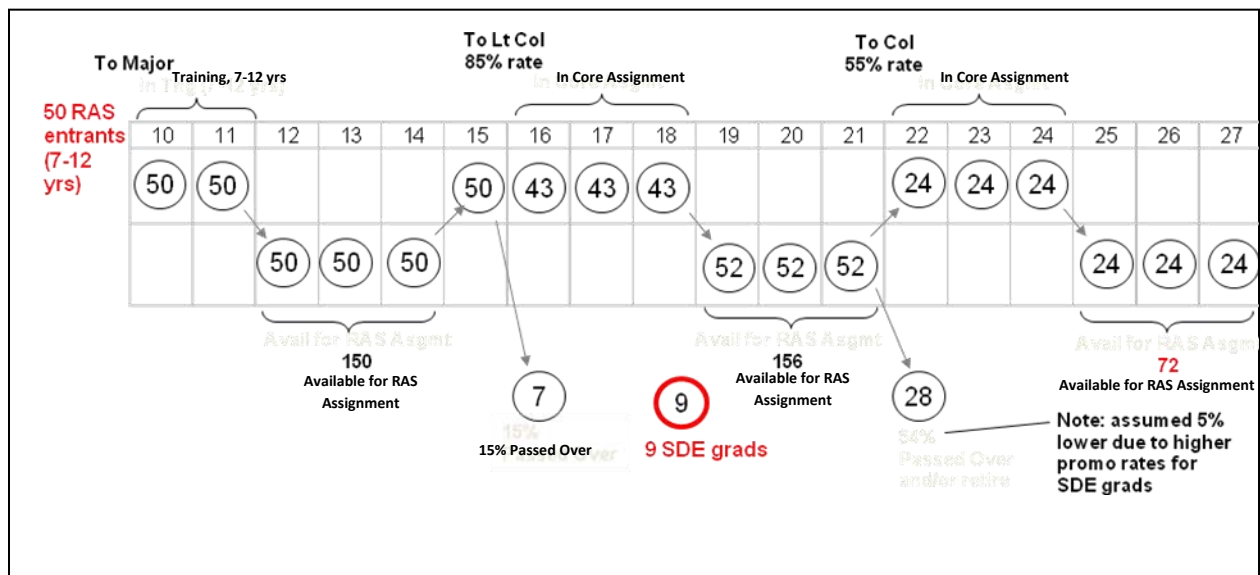
One positive move was delegating development of the program to the Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force for International Affairs (SAF/IA). This was the right first move for lending credibility and horsepower to the program. It also had the added benefit of marrying the “personnel” selection and development team of the RAS program with the IAS requirement stakeholders. Indeed, both the Air Forces’ attaché desk and specific regional sections are resident at SAF/IA.

Another positive step was a comprehensive gameplan for summarily educating the entire USAF officer cadre regarding the IAS program, embodied by a SAF/IA-issued, 19-page IAS Communication plan complete with answers to the most frequently asked questions and a rigorous timeline of tactics for ensuring a successful program. The plan had a clear objective “to educate all Air Force officers about the career opportunities available in the International Affairs arena.” The Communication Plan clearly states that the IAS program will be “tied to the new Force Development program and promises Pol-Mil to be a “desired skill pairing for career development.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, SAF/IA has paid due diligence to its charter of stewardship for the IAS program by rigorously tracking personnel capabilities and forging numerous education and training pioneer projects.<sup>11</sup> But the challenges are daunting. There is a demand for a total of 250 O-4/O-5 RAS billets as well as 70 O-6 “must-fill” RAS billets. Where will they all come from?

## Challenges to Senior Officer RAS Development

On the supply side, Figure 1 (below) depicts the entire RAS Pipeline that will ensure that the “required number” of RAS Colonels are deliberately developed. For any given year group, 50 RASs are developed between the 7 and 12 year point—24 remain at the 22-year point after normal promotion attrition. In order to meet current demand, these numbers include a pre-programmed SDE production, currently at nine per year.<sup>12</sup> Astoundingly, these numbers assume no academic attrition, no pre-retirement separations or deaths, and normal retirement and promotion statistics! In other words, these numbers indicate there will always be a need for at least nine officers requiring RAS development at the more senior SDE level. Additionally, that number will increase given *any* academic or retention attrition.



### Notes:

- Required number of Colonels is met
- Majors available for RAS assignment slightly exceeds requirement (150 vs. 120); creates surge capacity
- Lt Cols available for RAS assignment slightly exceeds requirement (156 vs. 130); creates surge capacity
- Total annual DE production: 59 (50 BDE/IDE window + 9 SDE)
- Source: International Affairs Specialist Program, Selection/Training Quotas and Billet Requirements Brief

Figure 1

Exacerbating this need, in the near term, is the natural delay induced by any cold-start pipeline program. Program pioneers envision a future system where most RAS personnel are selected and trained in the 7-12 year window, thereby creating a constant flow of RAS personnel to higher ranks...and any attrition can be compensated for by training at the SDE level. Unfortunately, those O-6 billets are not future billets—they need to be filled now. In effect, since the 7-12 year window effectively began in 2007, there will be a dearth of IAS-program trained senior officer RAS positions for all year groups older than 1995. The 1988 year group will meet its O-6 promotion board in spring of 2009. That’s a 7-year bathtub—a significant gap in deliberately developed RAS’s. As Colonel Robert Sarnoski, then chief of the International Airmen Division at SAF/IA, stated in Fall, 2005: “While IAS implementation is proceeding at an aggressive pace, the full benefit of the transformation will take a decade or more to achieve.”<sup>13</sup>,

Furthermore, any existing RAS’s inherited from the previous FAO program were not subject to the deliberate development and active management imbued by the current IAS program to ensure proficiency or congruence with existing requirements. The current legion of RAS personnel brought into service prior to 1995 is therefore clustered around an insufficient subset of languages and regional areas. Indeed, prior to 1996, there is only one Arabic and two Chinese speakers in the entire RAS program. (See Figure 2 Below) Starting in 1995, a more uniform pattern of language skills begins to emerge. With nine specific regional areas (Eurasia, Europe, Northeast Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East/North Africa, China, Latin America), development of an adequate array of regional specialists constitutes a significant challenge, particularly for the “gap” years prior to the 1995 year group.

**RAS Personnel Language Capabilities, by Commissioning Year\***

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
<b>Arabic</b>						1		
<b>Chinese</b>			1	1				
<b>French</b>	4	2	2	2		1		1
<b>German</b>			2		1		1	2
<b>Japanese</b>		1	1		2			
<b>Korean</b>								1
<b>Russian</b>			2			1		
<b>Spanish</b>	4	2	3		1	2		3
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
<b>Arabic</b>		4	3	4	4	4	1	1
<b>Chinese</b>	1	5	2	2	3	3	2	
<b>French</b>	1	2	3		2			
<b>German</b>		2		1		1		
<b>Japanese</b>	1	2	1	2	2	1		
<b>Korean</b>	2		1	2				
<b>Russian</b>	1	2	4		5	2		
<b>Spanish</b>	4	4	4	8	2	1	1	

\* - 5 or less speakers total: Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Malay, Norwegian, Persian-Farsi, Polish, Portugese, Pushtu, Romanian, Serbo Croatian, Thai, Turkish, Uzbek, Vietnamese  
Source: SAF/IA RAS Database

**Figure 2**

Finally, in order to determine desired “promotability” of RAS personnel, promotion statistics won’t be available until the first wave of deliberately developed RAS’s competes for the rank of Colonel in 2016. And since the original cadre of deliberately developed RAS personnel includes the year groups 1995-2000, it will be 2021 before a valid “rate of RAS

promotion” is available. Until that point, it is unclear whether traditional promotion retention rates will support the current RAS pipeline model.

Therefore, with a pre-programmed permanent need for a modest SDE RAS development program, a (hopefully) short-term insufficient number of RAS personnel with non-deliberately developed and clustered training, and the long-term uncertainty of RAS career field promotional viability, the need for a well crafted, enduring SDE “pipeline enhancement” track is imperative. But when and where should the language training and regional advanced academic degree education be accomplished to maximize both efficiency and effectiveness?

Consistent with IAS program guidelines, training and education for a RAS vying for an O-6 RAS position should happen exactly when the current IAS program calls for it...at the 7-12 year point. This allows officers to gain the necessary field experience to make them viable and effective when serving in higher ranking positions. But nevertheless, the question remains: if, as has been shown, there is a need for a small cadre of “late to the game” deliberately developed senior level RASs, what is the best method for educating and training a Lieutenant Colonel to meet this expectation?

Before analyzing how we *could* develop senior officers, the first question is really *should* we be educating and training Lieutenant Colonels? Further complicating the consideration of O-5 RAS education and training is a shift in assignment authority at the Colonel level. In an interview with Mr. Mike Nolte, the GS-15 deputy of SAF/IAPA (attaché affairs), an unforeseen impediment to RAS hiring at the Colonel level is the change of control over the assignment process.

As is widely known, for O-5s and below the matching authority is held at the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) in San Antonio, Texas. Matching is largely requirement driven. If a



legitimate requirement exists, AFPC will fill the RAS position with trained and educated RAS personnel if available. Since many of the RAS Pol-Mil requirements are easily validated autonomously by AFPC desk officers, SAF/IA (as the steward over the available RAS personnel pool), can directly interface with AFPC to influence a relatively straightforward “RAS” match.

At the Colonel level, however, the hiring authority shifts to AF/DPO...the “Colonel’s Group.” The hiring process at DPO is radically different and is driven more by the personnel desires of General Officers, rather than any specific requirement-skill matchup. General Officers bid for Colonels they are interested in hiring, without (necessarily) deference to any special coding, such as “RAS.” The end result is that anyone educated and trained to be a RAS at the O-5 level may be assigned outside the RAS career field in the O-6 bid process based upon their skills or experiences attained outside the RAS program. They could be the beneficiary of a tremendous amount of expensive training, only to be pulled away from the RAS track at the DPO matching. Indeed, this is currently *likely* to occur since most SDE selects, to this point, have reached the top of their field not by being a RAS, but by being the best in their core career fields. This has earned them advocacy by certain senior leaders, who, in turn, are likely to seek them out after SDE for hire. So without any tie between RAS development and the DPO matching process, developing a RAS at the 18-year point presents the risk of SAF/IA being unable to use their “newly developed” senior officer RAS—effectively realizing zero payback for their significant education and training investment.

Therefore, if we are to deliberately educate and train O-5s for RAS duties, a mechanism is required to protect the USAF’s significant investment in the RAS specialty. Because, as is apparent from the number of must-fill O-6 billets compared to the number of personnel available via the RAS deliberate development pipeline, there is a deficit which requires some form of

“just-in-time” training and education. Add in the unknown promotion statistics and the possible early separations or retirements and the argument is solid that a limited number of SDE-level personnel will always require training and education (assuming properly trained and educated personnel continue to be desired). As General Jumper said, we need airmen with the “right skill sets to understand the specific regional context in which air and space power may be applied.”

So, if properly trained RAS personnel for O-6 positions are the goal and there is a modest need to develop senior officers who did not enter the RAS program at the 7-12 year point, what options are available? Specifically, how can we ensure a fresh O-5 receives the requisite language training, in-country experience, and advanced academic degree necessary to successfully accomplish their impending regional tasking?

### **Options for Deliberate Development of Senior Level RAS Personnel**

#### **Language**

The desired level of language for a RAS is exceptionally aggressive. DoDD 1315.17 mandates “foreign language skills at the professional level, (Interagency Language Roundtable Level Reading 3/Listening 3 with a goal of Speaking 3), in the dominant language used by the populations of the countries or regions in which they specialize.”<sup>14</sup> Only an experienced and trained linguist can fully appreciate how difficult attaining a “3/3/3” level of any language really is...and the difficulty is measured in both time and effort, in roughly equal parts.

The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) is truly an interagency forum comprising 17 different agencies including the Department of Defense, Department of State, Central Intelligence Agency, and National Security Agency.<sup>15</sup> The ILR was born after WW II and the Korean War after communication’s analysis revealed a dearth of foreign language proficiency. A commission established by Congress in 1952 quickly determined that no industry-recognized

standard existed for evaluating language skills. To that point, subjective comments submitted by applicants combined with their (also non-standardized) college grades determined a given person's assessed language skills. A more objective evaluation was needed. This realization evolved into the regimented "grading scheme" that exists today and evaluates language speakers on a scale from 0 to 5 for three distinct language skills: reading, listening, and speaking.<sup>16</sup>

These language levels are determined by carefully monitored—and protected—standardized testing. A 3/3/3 level is effectively the highest level a non-native speaker can expect to attain. For listening, Level 3 equates to "General Professional Proficiency" where the linguist is "able to understand the essentials of all speech in a standard dialect including technical discussions within a special field" and "can understand without difficulty all forms of standard speech concerning a special professional field."<sup>17</sup> For reading, a linguist who has "General Professional Proficiency" must be "[a]ble to read within a normal range of speed and with almost complete comprehension a variety of authentic prose material on unfamiliar subjects" and is "[a]lmost always able to interpret material correctly, relate ideas and 'read between the lines.'"<sup>18</sup>

The Defense Language Institute and Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) is the indisputable hub for all military foreign language training. As a testament to the difficulty of attaining a 3/3/3, the DLIFLC General Catalog states "the minimum graduation requirement for the basic instructional program in every language is a U.S. Government Interagency Language Roundtable Level 2 in reading comprehension, Level 2 in listening comprehension, and Level 1+ in speaking ability."<sup>19</sup> The school only guarantees a 2/2/1+ level of proficiency! This is after significant, dedicated training with no other job-related distractions: 63 weeks for Chinese and Japanese; 47 weeks for Tagalog, Vietnamese, Russian, Turkish and Thai; 34 weeks for German; 25 weeks for French and Italian. Moreover, DLIFLC meets this goal only 79% of the time.<sup>20</sup> So

after a year of training, a DLIFLC-graduated Chinese linguist will only have “[s]ufficient comprehension to read simple, authentic written material in a form equivalent to usual printing or typescript on subjects within a familiar context”<sup>21</sup> and “[s]ufficient comprehension to understand conversations on routine social demands and limited job requirements.”<sup>22</sup> This is the DLIFLC 2/2 “Limited Working Proficiency” level. Clearly, the DoDD-directed 3/3 level of required proficiency is an ambitious goal.

Anecdotally, I personally graduated DLIFLC with a 2/3 in the German language (DLIFLC standardized testing only evaluates Listening and Reading proficiencies). I was immediately sent to Landsberg, Germany, where I was immersed in the German culture as an Exchange Officer. After two years of in-country experience, I finally attained a 3/3 on the Defense Language Proficiency Test.

There are no shortcuts for language training. Although Air War College has instituted a nominal language portion into the curriculum, it is only designed to be a familiarization and cannot be substituted for the kind of training required to attain the DoDD-mandated language levels for regional experts. Nor could a more focused and intense language curriculum be implemented without catastrophically detracting from the core advanced academic degree requirements which is an equally important leg of the RAS education and training triad. The USAF will need to send RAS applicants to specific language training separate from any IDE or SDE...there is no way around it.

### **In-country Experience**

Similar to the daunting language requirement, in-country experience will likely be limited to foreign SDE attendees and those senior officers who have fortuitously gained in-country experience through previous assignments. Although Air War College has an impressive

Regional Cultural Studies elective that includes 34 hours of in-depth classroom instruction and a 2-week field study to a particular world region, it is merely a familiarization and does not meet the intentions of DoDD 1315.17's mandate for "duty experience involving significant interaction with host nationals and/or host nation entities."<sup>23</sup>

If time allows, senior level RAS candidates can take advantage of the SAF/IA-funded Language and Area Studies Immersion (LASI) program. Designed as a 1-month immersion, it places candidates inside the host nation to both hone language skills and enable irreplaceable interaction with host nationals. If security is an issue, the program also provides for "CONUS isolation immersion" designed to simulate the host nation environment<sup>24</sup>.

Beyond LASI, candidates may also use certain DoD Regional Security Centers to help further their in-country experience and knowledge. Institutions such as the George C. Marshall Center in Garmisch, Germany, the Asia-Pacific center in Hawaii, the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies and Near-East South Asia Center (both in Washington, D.C.), and the African Center for Strategic Studies (Ft. McNair) are available resources for providing a forum of expertise that includes regional scholars and national policy makers. Although not nearly as robust as either direct in-country experience or even LASI, these regional centers can provide networking opportunities, informational conferences, educational materials, and research materials relevant to the region in question.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, as was previously noted, General Jumper's Tiger Team allowed for the possibility of the initial RAS assignment providing the "on-the-job" training required for in-country experience once RAS candidates have attained both language training and the advanced academic degree. Although this is clearly the "least desired" option, it may be the only course of action given time constraints, especially for senior officers. Furthermore, given the immense

scope and time requirement needed for meaningful in-country experience, it is unlikely that CONUS-based national SDE programs can provide any useful mechanism for ensuring adequate completion of this RAS requirement.

### **Regionally Focused Advanced Academic Degree**

Within the USAF's purview, there are three salient considerations for RAS candidates to attain a regionally focused advanced academic degree: Foreign PME, Civilian Institutions, and Air War College. Six primary variables will help shape the analysis and comparison of these three media: time, expense, quality (of academic education), feasibility, availability, and standardization. Since each of these three options also have differing levels of integration of the previously discussed RAS requirements, the analysis will also include discussion of the "comprehensiveness" of each program—that is, the degree to which a RAS candidate must complete further education and training to be a fully qualified RAS.

**Foreign PME** With regard to this "comprehensiveness," foreign PME stands alone as the most desired option. Foreign PME represents the ultimate "triple dip," providing the RAS candidate with language training, in-country experience, and an advanced academic degree.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the foreign PME pipeline is established. Indeed, it is already integrated with the USAF Developmental Team vectoring process and also pre-programs language training vis-à-vis school vacancy requirements. Along with the "already-in-place" feasibility of this option, there is also a time savings with the RAS candidate receiving both the advanced academic degree and in-country experience concurrently. Finally, since it is effectively a military exchange, there are no "additional costs" of foreign PME beyond normal PCS, Cost of Living Allowances, and Language school costs.

Unfortunately, the advantages of foreign PME cannot be enjoyed by everyone. Availability for each institution is presently limited to one per year, which, although good for one RAS in one region, cannot be relied upon for any kind of redundant, efficient RAS “mass production” model. Also, since foreign military institutions are not bound to any U.S. accreditation standards, the quality of the education cannot be universally vouchsafed. As a minimum, it will certainly not provide Joint Professional Military Education (Phase II) for potential joint officers (note previous statistic: 75% of RAS positions are joint). In the same vein, with only one person per year, per foreign institution, aspiring RAS candidates will not enjoy any level of USAF-approved standardization of their RAS education. Quite simply, the Air Force will have little control over the education of a RAS candidate attending foreign PME.

**Civilian Institutions** Many of the same advantages and disadvantages of foreign PME also apply to civilian universities. There are several accomplished, regionally focused advanced academic degrees offered by prestigious institutions across the U.S. Since they are already in place, they offer the RAS candidate an “off-the-shelf,” ready-to-go, feasible option. In terms of “comprehensiveness,” many civilian universities include a language requirement as part of their curriculum which, with subsequent successful Defense Language Proficiency testing, could obviate the need for further language study.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to foreign PME, the quality and availability of civilian education options represent significant advantages. Naturally, Columbia’s Ivy League status carries an indisputable academic credibility. Moreover, civilian institutions offering international degrees always require the much-desired regional specialization; Columbia offers seven regional specialties that compare favorably with the RAS designated regions. Furthermore, with over 600 students per year, Columbia’s SIPA program alone could absorb and educate every RAS

candidate needed by SAF/IA.<sup>28</sup> Beyond Columbia, there is no shortage of accomplished universities that offer similar, comprehensive, regionally focused advanced academic degrees.

This availability and quality come with a cost, however. Columbia's program requires a minimum of two years (four semesters) to complete with an annual tuition fee of over \$36,000.<sup>29</sup> Coupled with the likelihood of subsequent language training and in-country experience, the time and money costs represent significant disadvantages for civilian institutions providing RAS education. Finally, similar to foreign PME, civilian institutions are beyond the reach of USAF influence and, therefore, do not offer any kind of RAS education standardization.

**Air War College** Air War College (AWC), the USAF's medium for Senior Developmental Education, offers a completely different array of advantages and disadvantages compared to both foreign PME and civilian institutions. Although AWC doesn't have an in-place, "RAS-ready" *regionally focused* Master's degree, it does offer a Master's degree in Strategic Studies and, additionally, has all the resident tools, flexibility, and resources to provide any RAS candidate with a credible regional focus.

AWC has 10 major elements: four "core" courses that focus on national strategy, international security studies, and warfighting; four electives including a regional and culture studies (RCS) course that includes a 2-week international field study, one joint strategic leadership course, and one research paper. The foundation for a regionally focused degree is already in place, given that (1) the international security studies course is comprised of a National Security and Decision Making (NSDM) sub-course (complete with a visit from the State Department) and a Global Security sub-course, and (2) the RCS course and research paper can easily be customized toward a specific area. Fourteen of thirty-five credit hours are already devoted to topics relevant to regional affairs.



Rounding out the regional focus would depend upon individualized tailoring of the remaining three elective periods. With the proper constellation of regional electives, a RAS candidate could graduate AWC with 20 of 35 credit hours devoted to regional affairs. The possibilities for electives are limited only by faculty expertise, and will be dependent upon each specific RAS candidate's region of focus. As a beginning point, AWC already offers a full complement of "off the shelf" electives, many of which would lend themselves to RAS candidates, both in specific and generic terms. For example, Dr. Stefan Eisen of the Negotiation Center of Excellence teaches both a generic negotiation elective as well as a class devoted to cross-cultural negotiation considerations. Dr. Judith Gentleman teaches a Latin America Security Issues elective that covers topics from "Patterns of Development and Historical Legacies" to "Mexico's Internal Conflict."<sup>30</sup> Other 2008-2009 topical electives include "International Rivals: Leaders & Strategic Cultures in Adversary States," "Globalization," "Terrorism," "China's Use of Force," and "Cultures of Violence," any of which may apply to a given RAS candidate's region of expertise.

Additionally, the *AWC Professional Studies Paper and Core Electives Program Student and Faculty Handbook* specifically authorizes alternative options to support RAS regional research opportunities. Students may elect a "Directed Study" approach which allows them to conduct a research project of their choice under the tutelage of an AWC faculty member. Similarly, the AWC Commandant may approve certain "Special Projects" which can be of any "nature and scope" deemed relevant to the student's individual needs.<sup>31</sup> Either of these options satisfies a single elective class. Clearly, this flexibility offers a myriad of possibilities for a RAS candidate who possesses both the creativity and energy to develop an elective plan—under the guidance of an AWC faculty member—that melds with his or her regional area.

Finally, a last consideration would be for RAS candidates to attend the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) to satisfy a single elective period. As the hub of all training for Department of State Foreign Officers, the FSI offers 450 different courses to more than 50,000 students each year. In particular for AWC RAS candidates, FSI offers 2-week courses specifically focused on regional areas pertinent to RAS education.<sup>32</sup> Whether attended while TDY from AWC or during the month of July immediately preceding the beginning of AWC, a Department of State sponsored course would be a perfect match for a single elective in any RAS candidate's regionally focused degree.

Since the quality of the prospective RAS candidate's regional education at AWC is dependent upon the effort expended in creating meaningful elective study opportunities, each AWC RAS must carefully consider appropriate study options. Dr. Gentleman's Latin America Security elective offers a superb "starting point" for both RAS candidates and AWC faculty to consider in constructing such "meaningful" research opportunities: Historical Legacies, Contemporary Challenges, Socio-Political Developments, Security Challenges, Internal Conflicts, Implications of Regional Wars, and Energy Challenges.<sup>33</sup>

Although the degree is accomplished in a single year at AWC, RAS candidates must accomplish both language training and in-country experience elsewhere—in other words, AWC is not nearly as "comprehensive" as foreign PME. Although the time savings are better than the 2-year civilian degree, they aren't nearly as advantageous as foreign PME. On the plus side, AWC is available to any number of RAS candidates and, therefore, offers Air Force control over implementation and standardization of the program not present in the other options. Similar to foreign PME, AWC offers no significant cost barriers beyond normal PCS expenses.

With foreign PME, civilian institutions, and AWC, there are three feasible “ready today” options for RAS candidates seeking a regionally focused advanced academic degree, all with different advantages and disadvantages that cater to RAS candidates with different needs. (See figure 3 below)

	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Quality of Advanced Academic Degree</u>	<u>Availability</u>	<u>Feasibility</u>	<u>Standardization</u>	<u>Best Designed for Senior Level RAS Candidates Who:</u>
<u>Foreign SDE</u>	Nominal	1 Year + Language Training	Variable	Restricted	In-Place	Little	are starting from "ground zero" with strong language aptitude scores
<u>Civilian Institution</u>	High	2 Years	Excellent	Many opportunities, 2x per year	In-Place	Little	have 2 years before needed in RAS assignment and previous language and in-country experience
<u>Air War College</u>	Nominal	1 Year	Given available faculty expertise and a well- developed elective plan: Excellent	Many opportunities, 1x per year	Strong possibilities, with customized elective study	As much as desired	have been selected for SDE and have previous language and in-country experience

Figure 3

So, with the various options for language, in-country experience, and a regional degree presented in this paper, what measures can the USAF implement today to provide a viable path for senior officers to become RAS qualified?

## **Recommendations**

First, and most importantly, SAF/IA must aggressively and proactively work to match RAS candidates to Senior Level RAS requirements as soon as possible. This is not an easy task, especially over the next seven years where RAS officers have not benefited from deliberate development and, as depicted in Figure 2, significant gaps of expertise exist. According to Colonel “Mack” Coleman, SAF/IAPA, to fill these gaps the program will largely rely on identifying individuals who have fortuitously received language training and in-country experience...much like the old USAF FAO program.

Barring discovery of such “pre-trained” individuals, the time burden of language training (up to 63 weeks) and degree requirements (1-2 years) means that SAF/IA must identify people for positions up to 3-4 years in advance! By establishing a “training start date for a non-trained RAS” for all existing RAS requirements, SAF/IA personnel can blanket Developmental Team meetings to ensure quality personnel are matched to requirements via a viable, worst-case “RAS Training Pipeline” (the “where & when” for language training and a regional degree). This will also provide the ancillary benefit of SAF/IA injecting direct, on-the-spot advocacy for RAS personnel to attend the coveted (and RAS education/training efficient!) foreign PME slots. Indeed, the best solution for maximizing senior RAS opportunities is to mandate that Developmental Teams fill all foreign PME slots with SAF/IA-approved RAS candidates...or risk losing them. This will have the dual benefit of maintaining Senior Officer RAS production quotas while enhancing promotion opportunities for RAS candidates bound for the six<sup>34</sup> “choice” foreign PME SDE slots.

Equally important is ensuring buy-in from the Colonel’s group for pre-identified RAS O-6 assignments so that the RAS pipeline process proceeds unhindered. A simple mechanism such

as a bi-annual SAF/IAPA and AF/DPO Senior Officer RAS programming meeting to communicate and coordinate RAS matches could adequately forecast—and, importantly, fence off—senior officers destined for RAS-coded assignments. But what is the best solution for creating such a “bulletproof forecast?”

Clearly, the forecast must include a blueprint for ensuring tailored education and training for RAS personnel matched to RAS requirements. Is language training needed? If so, where and when? Is a regional academic degree required? If so, where and when? Is AWC involved? If so, have they received timely notification and a suggested education plan based on the required region? Will the RAS attend the Foreign Service Institute for elective credit? If so, when will they attend?

The solution lies at the footstep of Air University (AU), the Air Force’s “Intellectual and Leadership Center.” AU is home to the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC), a perfect institution to help SAF/IA in developing customized RAS education and training plans. With a website that touts their “Culture, Region, and Language Program,” AFCLC’s core mission includes the charter to “define, implement and synchronize cultural, regional and foreign language education for officers.”<sup>35</sup> By partnering with SAF/IA, AFCLC could provide valuable guidance, coordination, co-stewardship, and synchronization of customized education and training for RAS candidates...and also aid AWC students and faculty in identifying appropriate regional study alternatives.

### **Conclusion**

Creating a fully trained RAS at the senior Lieutenant Colonel/Colonel level to fill O-6 RAS requirements is challenging. Unfortunately, built-in pipeline SDE-production requirements and near-term shortfalls of deliberately developed senior officer RAS personnel dictate careful

analysis of feasible alternatives for training and education to ensure program success. This paper has argued that there are no shortcuts for either the stringent language requirements or the desired in-country experience. However, for the DoDD-mandated regionally focused advanced academic degree, this paper has presented three viable options for “late to the game” senior officers seeking RAS qualification—foreign PME, civilian universities, and Air War College—each with unique advantages and disadvantages. Armed with a proactively deliberated, well coordinated, and “DPO-approved” forecast that punctually pre-identifies untrained senior officer RAS personnel, SAF/IA can create a robust cadre of RAS qualified senior officers “*with international insight, foreign language proficiency and cultural understanding...who have the right skill sets to understand the specific regional context in which air and space power may be applied.*”<sup>36</sup>

“...Everyone must do nation-building...Cultural awareness is a force multiplier...”

--Lt Gen David Petraeus’ #7 and #9 “Observations from Soldiering in Iraq”<sup>37</sup>

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> The White House, “Invest in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Military,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/defense/>
- <sup>2</sup> Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 1315.17, *Military Department Foreign Affairs Officer (FAO) Programs*, 28 April, 2005, para 3.1
- <sup>3</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 16-109, *International Affairs Specialist (IAS) Program*, 23 June 2006, para 1.1
- <sup>4</sup> International Affairs Specialist Program, Selection/Training Quotas and Billet requirements, May 2005, Slides 4-6
- <sup>5</sup> E-mail correspondence with SAF/IA RAS/PAS officer, Lt Col Steve Hughes
- <sup>6</sup> Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 1315.17, *Military Department Foreign Affairs Officer (FAO) Programs*, 28 April, 2005, para 3.3
- <sup>7</sup> International Affairs Specialist Program Concept, Personnel Sub-Group Findings, July 2004, slides 6-7
- <sup>8</sup> Department of the Army Pamphlet P600-3-48, Functional Area Officer, August 1987, pg. 5.
- <sup>9</sup> Foreign Area Officer Association, “Current State of the Air Force Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Program,” <http://www.faoa.org/service/usaf1203.html>
- <sup>10</sup> International Affairs Specialist Communications Plan, 1 Jun 05, Pg. 1
- <sup>11</sup> Indeed, the genesis of this paper came as a result of my one-on-one interaction with SAF/IA’s Lt Col Steve Hughes as he attempts to find the right “SDE conduit” for RAS personnel.
- <sup>12</sup> International Affairs Specialist Program, Selection/Training Quotas and Billet requirements, May 2005, Slides 2-4
- <sup>13</sup> The DISAM Journal of International Security Assistance Management, Vol. 28 No. 1, Fall 2005, pg. 14.
- <sup>14</sup> Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 1315.17, *Military Department Foreign Affairs Officer (FAO) Programs*, 28 April, 2005, para 4.5.1.3
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<sup>19</sup> Defense Language Institute and Foreign Language Center, “DLIFLC Mission,” [http://www.dliflc.edu/academics/academic\\_affairs/dli\\_catalog/mission.htm](http://www.dliflc.edu/academics/academic_affairs/dli_catalog/mission.htm)

<sup>20</sup> John L. Conway, “The View from the Tower of Babel,” *Air and Space Power Journal*, Summer, 2005

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 1315.17, *Military Department Foreign Affairs Officer (FAO) Programs*, 28 April, 2005, para 4.5.1.2

<sup>24</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 16-109, *International Affairs Specialist (IAS) Program*, 23 June 2006, page 20

<sup>25</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 16-109, *International Affairs Specialist (IAS) Program*, 23 June 2006, page 21

<sup>26</sup> Per SAF/IA, RAS candidates attending foreign PME institutions are granted a waiver for the regionally focused Advanced Academic Degree

<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, this offering does not guarantee adequate language training, given that “proficiency” is often measured simply in terms of course grades offered at the institution. For example, Columbia’s School for International and Public Affairs (SIPA) offers a Masters in International Affairs that mandates foreign language proficiency. To show proficiency, Columbia requires (as a minimum) that students maintain a “B” average in their language courses to fulfill this requirement.<sup>28</sup> Given the aforementioned analysis of the RAS program’s stringent language proficiency levels (measured via standardized proficiency language testing), it is likely that RAS candidates attending a civilian university will most likely require follow-on language training.

<sup>28</sup> Columbia School of International and Public Affairs, “About SIPA,” [http://sipa.columbia.edu/about\\_sipa/index.html](http://sipa.columbia.edu/about_sipa/index.html)

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> AWC Elective Syllabus, Elective 6784, Latin America Security Issues, Dr. Judith Gentleman

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Foreign Service Institute,” <http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/>

<sup>33</sup> AWC Elective Syllabus, Elective 6784, Latin America Security Issues, Dr. Judith Gentleman

<sup>34</sup> Argentina National Defense School, French Defense College, Japanese National Institute for Defense Studies, Royal Superior College of Defense, Geneva Center for Security Studies, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. Source: Air Force Personnel Center Office Officer Development Education, *Intermediate/Senior Developmental Education Programs*, May 2008

<sup>35</sup> Air Force Culture, Region, and Language Center, “Mission,” <http://www.culture.af.edu/AFCL.html>

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